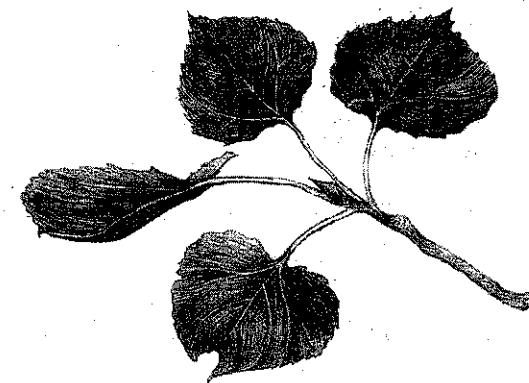


PROCESS ANALYSIS

Explaining Step by Step



THE METHOD

A chemist working for a soft-drink firm is asked to improve on a competitor's product, Orange Quench. First, she chemically tests a sample to figure out what's in the drink. This is the method of **DIVISION OR ANALYSIS**, the separation of something into its parts in order to understand it (see the following chapter). Then the chemist writes a report telling her boss how to make a drink like Orange Quench, but better. This recipe is a special kind of analysis, called **PROCESS ANALYSIS**: explaining step by step how to do something or how something is done.

Like any type of analysis, process analysis divides a subject into its components: It divides a continuous action into stages. Processes much larger and more involved than the making of an orange drink also may be analyzed. When geologists explain how a formation such as the Grand Canyon occurred—a process taking several hundred million years—they describe the successive layers of sediment deposited by oceans, floods, and wind; then the great uplift of the entire region by underground forces; and then the erosion, visible to us today, by the Colorado River and its tributaries, by little streams and flash floods, by crumbling and falling rock, and by wind. Exactly what are the geologists doing in this explanation? They are taking a complicated event

(or process) and dividing it into parts. They are telling us what happened first, second, and third, and what is still happening today.

Because it is useful in explaining what is complicated, process analysis is a favorite method of scientists such as geologists. The method, however, may be useful to anybody. Two PURPOSES of process analysis are very familiar to you:

- A *directive process analysis* explains how to do something or make something. You meet it when you read a set of instructions for assembling newly purchased stereo components, or follow the directions to a stereo store ("Turn right at the blinker and follow Patriot Boulevard for 2.4 miles...").
- An *informative process analysis* explains how something is done or how it takes place. This is the kind we often read out of curiosity. Such an essay may tell of events beyond our control: how atoms behave when split, how lions hunt, how a fertilized egg develops into a child.

In this chapter, you will find examples of both kinds of process analysis—both the "how to" and the "how." For instance, Tibor Kalman and Lulu Kalman offer a funny directive on how to open a CD package, while Jessica Mitford spellbindingly informs us of how corpses are embalmed (but, clearly, she doesn't expect us to rush down to our basements and give her instructions a try).

Sometimes process analysis is used very imaginatively. Foreseeing that the sun eventually will cool, the earth shrink, the oceans freeze, and all life perish, an astronomer who cannot possibly behold the end of the world nevertheless can write a process analysis of it. An exercise in learned guesswork, such an essay divides a vast and almost inconceivable event into stages that, taken one at a time, become clearer and more readily imaginable.

Whether it is useful or useless (but fun to imagine), an effective process analysis can grip readers and even hold them fascinated. Say you were proposing a change in the procedures for course registration at your school. You could argue your point until you were out of words, but you would get nowhere if you failed to tell your readers exactly how the new process would work: That's what makes your proposal sing. Leaf through a current issue of a newsstand magazine, and you will find that process analysis abounds. You may meet, for instance, articles telling you how to tenderize cuts of meat, sew homemade designer jeans, lose fat, cut hair, play the money markets, arouse a bored mate, and search the World Wide Web. Less practical, but not necessarily less interesting, are the informative articles: how brain surgeons work, how diamonds are formed, how cities fight crime. Readers, it seems, have an

unslakable thirst for process analysis. In every issue of the *New York Times Book Review*, we find an entire best-seller list devoted to "Advice, How-to, and Miscellaneous," including books on how to make money in real estate, how to lose weight, how to find a good mate, and how to lose a bad one. Evidently, if anything will still make an American crack open a book, it is a step-by-step explanation of how he or she, too, can be a success at living.

THE PROCESS

Here are suggestions for writing an effective process analysis of your own. (In fact, what you are about to read is itself a process analysis.)

1. *Understand clearly the process you are about to analyze.* Think it through. This preliminary survey will make the task of writing far easier for you.
2. *Consider your thesis.* What is the point of your process analysis: Why are you bothering to tell readers about it? The THESIS SENTENCE for a process analysis need do no more than say what the subject is and maybe outline its essential stages. For instance:

The main stages in writing a process analysis are listing the steps in the process, drafting to explain the steps, and revising to clarify the steps.

But your readers will surely appreciate something livelier and more pointed, something that says "You can use this" or "This may surprise you" or "Listen up." Here are two examples from essays in this chapter:

[In a mortuary the body] is in short order sprayed, sliced, pierced, pickled, trussed, trimmed, creamed, waxed, painted, rouged, and neatly dressed—transformed from a common corpse into a Beautiful Memory Picture. (Jessica Mitford, "Behind the Formaldehyde Curtain")

Poisoning the earth can be difficult because the earth is always trying to cleanse and renew itself. (Linnea Saukko, "How to Poison the Earth")

3. *Think about preparatory steps.* If the reader should do something before beginning the process, list these steps. For instance, you might begin, "Remove the packing from the components," or, "First, lay out three eggs, one pound of Sheboygan bratwurst...."
4. *List the steps or stages in the process.* Try setting them down in chronological order, one at a time—if this is possible. Some processes,

however, do not happen in an orderly sequence, but occur all at once. If, for instance, you are writing an account of a typical earthquake, what do you mention first? The shifting of underground rock strata? Cracks in the earth? Falling houses? Bursting water mains? Toppling trees? Mangled cars? Casualties? Here is a subject for which the method of CLASSIFICATION (Chap. 7) may come to your aid. You might sort out apparently simultaneous events into categories: injury to people; damage to homes, to land, to public property.

5. *Check the completeness and order of the steps.* Make sure your list includes *all* the steps in the right order. Sometimes a stage of a process may contain a number of smaller stages. Make sure none has been left out. If any seems particularly tricky or complicated, underline it on your list to remind yourself when you write your essay to slow down and detail it with extra care.
6. *Define your terms.* Ask yourself, "Do I need any specialized or technical terms?" If so, be sure to define them. You'll sympathize with your reader if you have ever tried to work a Malaysia-made VCR that comes with an instruction booklet written in translatoresque, full of unexplained technical JARGON, or if you have ever tried to assemble a plastic tricycle according to a directive that begins, "Position sleeve casing on wheel center in fork with shaft in tong groove, and gently but forcibly tap in medium pal nut head."
7. *Use time-markers or TRANSITIONS.* These words or phrases indicate when one stage of a process stops and the next begins, and they greatly aid your reader in following you. Here, for example, is a paragraph of plain medical prose that makes good use of the helpful time-markers printed in *italics*. (The paragraph is adapted from Alan F. Guttmacher's *Pregnancy and Birth*.)

In the human, *thirty-six hours after* the egg is fertilized, a two-cell egg appears. A twelve-cell development takes place *in seventy-two hours*. The egg is *still* round and has increased little in diameter. In this respect it is like a real estate development. *At first* a road bisects the whole area, *then* a cross road divides it into quarters, and *later* other roads divide it into eighths and twelfths. This happens without the taking of any more land, simply by subdivision of the original tract. *On the third or fourth day*, the egg passes from the Fallopian tube into the uterus. *By the fifth day* the original single large cell has subdivided into sixty small cells and floats about the slitlike uterine cavity *a day or two longer*, then adheres to the cavity's inner lining. *By the twelfth day* the human egg is already firmly implanted. Impregnation is *now* completed, as yet unbeknown to the woman. *At present*, she has not even had time to miss her first menstrual period, and other symptoms of pregnancy are *still several days distant*.

Brief as these time-markers are, they define each stage of the human egg's journey. Note how the writer, after declaring in the second sentence that the egg forms twelve cells, backtracks for a moment and retraces the process by which the egg has subdivided, comparing it (by a brief ANALOGY) to a piece of real estate. When using time-markers, vary them so that they won't seem mechanical. If you can, avoid the monotonous repetition of a fixed phrase (*In the fourteenth stage . . . , In the fifteenth stage . . .*). Even boring time-markers, though, are better than none at all. As in any chronological narrative, words and phrases such as *in the beginning*, *first*, *second*, *next*, *after that*, *three seconds later*, *at the same time*, and *finally* can help a process to move smoothly in the telling and lodge firmly in the reader's mind.

8. *Be specific.* When you write a first draft, state your analysis in generous detail, even at the risk of being wordy. When you revise, it will be easier to delete than to amplify.
9. *Revise.* When your essay is finished, reread it carefully against the checklist below. You might also enlist a friend's help. If your process analysis is a directive ("How to Eat an Ice Cream Cone Without Dribbling"), see if the friend can follow your instructions without difficulty. If your process analysis is informative ("How a New Word Enters the Dictionary"), ask the friend whether the process unfolds as clearly in his or her mind as it does in yours.

CHECKLIST FOR REVISING A PROCESS ANALYSIS

- ✓ **THESIS.** Does your process analysis have a point? Have you made sure readers know what it is?
- ✓ **ORGANIZATION.** Have you arranged the steps of your process in a clear chronological order? If steps occur simultaneously, have you grouped them so that readers perceive some order?
- ✓ **COMPLETENESS.** Have you included all the necessary steps and explained each one fully? Is it clear how each one contributes to the result?
- ✓ **DEFINITIONS.** Have you explained the meanings of any terms your readers may not know?
- ✓ **TRANSITIONS.** Do time markers distinguish the steps and clarify their sequence?

PROCESS ANALYSIS IN A PARAGRAPH: TWO ILLUSTRATIONS

Using Process Analysis to Write About Television

The following paragraph, written especially for *The Brief Bedford Reader*, explains the process of setting the timer on a particular VCR. Though composed to be freestanding, the paragraph (ideally with an accompanying illustration) could easily be dropped into a complete set of instructions on how to operate the VCR.

The timer on your videocassette recorder permits you to record up to eight programs over a two-week period even when you are not at home. For each program you wish to record in your absence, locate an empty program number by pushing the P button until a flashing number appears on the TV screen. The next four steps set the information for the program. First, push the Day button until the day and date show on the screen. The screen will flash On. Next set the starting time (be sure the time is set correctly for A.M. or P.M.). Then push the Off button and set the ending time (again, watching A.M. or P.M.). When the times have been set, push the Chan button and set the channel using the unit's channel selector. You may review the program information by pushing the Check button. When you are satisfied that the settings are correct, push Timer to set the timer to operate. (The unit cannot be operated manually while the timer is on.)

Process to be explained
with directive analysis

Step 1

Preview of steps 2-5

Step 2

Step 3

Step 4

Step 5

Step 6

Step 7

Transitions (underlined)
clarify steps

Using Process Analysis in an Academic Discipline

This paragraph on our descent into sleep comes from a psychology textbook's section on "the most perplexing of our biological rhythms." Before this paragraph the authors review the history of sleep research; after it they continue to analyze the night-long process that follows this initial descent.

When you first climb into bed, close your eyes, and relax, your brain emits bursts of *alpha waves* in a regular, high-amplitude, low-frequency rhythm of 8-12 cycles per second. Alpha is associated with relaxing or not concentrating on anything in particular. Gradually these waves slow down even further and you drift into the Land of Nod, passing through four stages, each deeper than the previous one.

Steps preceding
process

Process to be explained
with informative analysis

1. Stage 1. Your brain waves become small and irregular, indicating activity with low voltage and mixed frequencies. You feel yourself drifting on the edge of consciousness, in a state of light sleep. If awakened, you may recall fantasies or a few visual images.

Step 1

2. Stage 2. Your brain emits occasional short bursts of rapid, high-peaking waves called *sleep spindles*. Light sounds or minor noises probably won't disturb you.
3. Stage 3. In addition to the waves characteristic of stage 2, your brain occasionally emits very slow waves of about 1-3 cycles per second, with very high peaks. These *delta waves* are a sure sign that you will be hard to arouse. Your breathing and pulse have slowed down, your temperature has dropped, and your muscles are relaxed.
4. Stage 4. Delta waves have now largely taken over, and you are in deep sleep. It will take vigorous shaking or a loud noise to awaken you, and you won't be very happy about it. Oddly enough, though, if you talk or walk in your sleep, this is when you are likely to do so.

Step 2

Step 3

Step 4

—Carole Wade and Carol Tavris, *Psychology*

PROCESS ANALYSIS ELSEWHERE IN THE BRIEF BEDFORD READER

Although process analysis is one of the most specialized methods of development, the writers of the following essays do find a need to explain how to do something or how something is done, even as they develop their ideas by other methods as well.

PART ONE

Brad Manning, "Arm Wrestling with My Father"
Deborah Tannen, "But What Do You Mean?"
Stephanie Ericsson, "The Ways We Lie"
William Lutz, "The World of Doublespeak"
Marie Winn, "TV Addiction"

PART TWO

Joan Didion, "In Bed"
Annie Dillard, "Lenses"

CASE STUDY

Using Process Analysis

As a sophomore at Mary Washington College in Virginia, Jennifer Meska was a resident assistant in a freshman dormitory, responsible for students' welfare and, when necessary, for establishing dormitory rules.

In the following memo to the dorm's residents, Meska explained what students must do in the three-times-yearly fire drills. Meska's aim in drafting the memo was to outline the drill procedure so that students could remember and follow it—in other words (though she didn't think of the task this way), to write a clear directive process analysis.

In her first draft, Meska ran the steps of the process together in a paragraph, and for some steps she omitted explanations that might motivate residents to follow them. The bulleted list in her revision and the added explanations make the steps more distinct and memorable.

TO: Residents of Russell Hall
FROM: Jennifer Meska
DATE: September 6, 2001
SUBJECT: Fire-drill procedure

To prepare for the possibility of a fire in our residence hall, we will run three unannounced fire drills throughout the year. These drills will familiarize you with the potentially lifesaving procedures to be used during a real fire.

A loud buzzing noise and flashing lights will signal the start of a fire drill.

Each resident has three minutes to complete the following tasks and exit the building:

- Close all bedroom and bathroom windows to prevent additional oxygen from feeding the fire.
- Turn off all electrical appliances, including computers, televisions, fans, radios, and lights. Turning off appliances will prevent electrical surges from starting additional fires.
- Grab a towel to cover your mouth in case you come across any smoke-filled passages, and wear shoes to protect your feet from any dangerous debris.

- Don't take anything else with you. In a real fire, delay could cost you your life.
- Close your door behind you to retard the spread of the fire.
- Go immediately to the nearest exit.

The fire drills are mandated by the state, and all residence halls must pass them in the required three minutes. If you have any questions, please let me know.

LINNEA SAUKKO

LINNEA SAUKKO was born in Warren, Ohio, in 1956. After receiving a degree in environmental quality control from Muskingum Area Technical College, she spent three years as an environmental technician, developing hazardous waste programs and acting as adviser on chemical safety at a large corporation. Concerned about the lack of safe methods for disposing of hazardous waste, Saukko went back to school to earn a BA in geology (Ohio State University, 1985) so that she could help address this issue. She currently lives in Hilliard, Ohio, and works as a groundwater manager at the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, evaluating various sites for possible contamination of the groundwater. She is also researching the long-range effects of declining populations of insect-eating birds due to pollution of their habitats.

How to Poison the Earth

"How to Poison the Earth" was written in response to an assignment given in a freshman composition class and was awarded a Bedford Prize in Student Writing. It was subsequently published in *Student Writers at Work: The Bedford Prizes* (1984). Saukko's essay is largely a directive process analysis, but it is also a SATIRE: By outwardly showing us one way to guarantee the fate of the earth, the author implicitly urges us not to do it.

Poisoning the earth can be difficult because the earth is always trying to cleanse and renew itself. Keeping this in mind, we should generate as much waste as possible from substances such as uranium-238, which has a half-life (the time it takes for half of the substance to decay) of one million years, or plutonium, which has a half-life of only 0.5 million years but is so toxic that if distributed evenly, ten pounds of it could kill every person on the earth. Because the United States generates about eighteen tons of plutonium per year, it is about the best substance for long-term poisoning of the earth. It would help if we would build more nuclear power plants because each one generates only 500 pounds of plutonium each year. Of course, we must include persistent toxic chemicals such as polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) and dichlorodiphenyl trichloroethane (DDT) to make sure we have enough toxins to poison the earth from the core to the outer atmosphere. First, we must develop many different ways of putting the waste from these nuclear and chemical substances in, on, and around the earth.

Putting these substances in the earth is a most important step in the poisoning process. With deep-well injection we can ensure that the earth is poi-

soned all the way to the core. Deep-well injection involves drilling a hole that is a few thousand feet deep and injecting toxic substances at extremely high pressures so they will penetrate deep into the earth. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), there are about 360 such deep injection wells in the United States. We cannot forget the groundwater aquifers that are closer to the surface. These must also be contaminated. This is easily done by shallow-well injection, which operates on the same principle as deep-well injection, only closer to the surface. The groundwater that has been injected with toxins will spread contamination beneath the earth. The EPA estimates that there are approximately 500,000 shallow injection wells in the United States.

Burying the toxins in the earth is the next best method. The toxins from landfills, dumps, and lagoons slowly seep into the earth, guaranteeing that contamination will last a long time. Because the EPA estimates there are only about 50,000 of these dumps in the United States, they should be located in areas where they will leak to the surrounding ground and surface water.

Applying pesticides and other poisons on the earth is another part of the poisoning process. This is good for coating the earth's surface so that the poisons will be absorbed by plants, will seep into the ground, and will run off into surface water.

Surface water is very important to contaminate because it will transport the poisons to places that cannot be contaminated directly. Lakes are good for long-term storage of pollutants while they release some of their contamination to rivers. The only trouble with rivers is that they act as a natural cleansing system for the earth. No matter how much poison is dumped into them, they will try to transport it away to reach the ocean eventually.

The ocean is very hard to contaminate because it has such a large volume and a natural buffering capacity that tends to neutralize some of the contamination. So in addition to the pollution from rivers, we must use the ocean as a dumping place for as many toxins as possible. The ocean currents will help transport the pollution to places that cannot otherwise be reached.

Now make sure that the air around the earth is very polluted. Combustion and evaporation are major mechanisms for doing this. We must continuously pollute because the wind will disperse the toxins while rain washes them from the air. But this is good because a few lakes are stripped of all living animals each year from acid rain. Because the lower atmosphere can cleanse itself fairly easily, we must explode nuclear tests bombs that shoot radioactive particles high into the upper atmosphere where they will circle the earth for years. Gravity must pull some of the particles to earth, so we must continue exploding these bombs.

So it is that easy. Just be sure to generate as many poisonous substances as possible and be sure they are distributed in, on, and around the entire earth at a greater rate than it can cleanse itself. By following these easy steps we can guarantee the poisoning of the earth.

Journal Writing

Saukko's essay is **SATIRE**—that is, an indirect attack on human follies or flaws, using **IRONY** to urge behavior exactly opposite what is really desired. In your journal, explore when you have proposed satirical solutions to problems that seem ridiculous or overwhelming—for example, suggesting breaking all the dishes so that they don't have to be washed again or barring pedestrians from city streets so that they don't interfere with cars. What kinds of situations might lead you to make suggestions like these? (To take your journal writing further, see "From Journal to Essay" on the facing page.)

Questions on Meaning

1. Is the author's main **PURPOSE** to amuse and entertain, to inform readers of ways they can make better use of natural resources, to warn readers about threats to the future of our planet, or to make fun of scientists? Support your answer with **EVIDENCE** from the essay.
2. Describe at least three of the earth's mechanisms for cleansing its land, water, and atmosphere, as presented in this essay.
3. According to Saukko, many of our actions are detrimental, if not outright destructive, to our environment. Identify these practices and discuss them. If these activities are harmful to the earth, why are they permitted? Do they serve some other important goal or purpose? If so, what? Are there other ways that these goals might be reached?

Questions on Writing Strategy

1. How detailed and specific are Saukko's instructions for poisoning the earth? Which steps in this process would you be able to carry out, once you finished reading the essay? In what instances might an author choose not to provide concrete, comprehensive instructions for a procedure? Relate your answer to the **TONE** and purpose of this essay.
2. How is Saukko's essay organized? Follow the process carefully to determine whether it happens chronologically, with each step depending on the one before it, or whether it follows another order. How effective is this method of organization and presentation?

3. For what **AUDIENCE** is this essay intended? How can you tell?
4. What is the tone of this essay? Consider especially the title and the last paragraph as well as examples from the body of the essay. How does the tone contribute to Saukko's satire?
5. **OTHER METHODS.** Saukko doesn't mention every possible pollutant but instead focuses on certain **EXAMPLES**. Why do you think she chooses these particular examples? What serious pollutants can you think of that Saukko doesn't mention specifically?

Questions on Language

1. How do the phrases "next best method" (par. 3), "another part of the poisoning process" (4), and "[l]akes are good for long-term storage of pollutants" (5) signal the tone of this essay? Should they be read literally, **IRONICALLY**, metaphorically, or some other way?
2. Be sure you know how to define the following words: generate, nuclear, toxins (par. 1); lagoons, contamination (3); buffering, neutralize (6); combustion (7).

Suggestions for Writing

1. **FROM JOURNAL TO ESSAY.** Choose one of the solutions you wrote about in your journal (facing page), or propose a solution to a problem that your journal entry has suggested. Write an essay detailing this satirical solution, paying careful attention to explaining each step of the process and to maintaining your satiric tone throughout.
2. Write an essay defending and justifying the use of nuclear power plants, pesticides, or another pollutant Saukko mentions. This essay will require some research because you will need to argue that the benefits of these methods outweigh their hazardous and destructive effects. Be sure to support your claims with factual information and statistics. Or approach the issue from the same point of view that Saukko did, and argue against the use of nuclear power plants or pesticides. Substantiate your argument with data and facts, and be sure to propose alternative sources of power or alternative methods of insect control.
3. **CRITICAL WRITING.** What does Saukko gain or lose by using satire and irony to make her point? What would be the comparative strengths and weaknesses of an essay that approached the same pollution problems straightforwardly and sincerely, perhaps urging or pleading with readers to stop polluting?
4. **CONNECTIONS.** Saukko is not the only writer of irony in this book: Among other authors, Suzanne Britt (p. 197), Dave Barry (p. 203), Jessica Mitford (p. 241), Horace Miner (p. 252), Judy Brady (p. 272), Emily Prager (p. 286), and H. L. Mencken (p. 432) also employ it. Based on Saukko's essay and essays by at least two of these others, define *irony*. If you need a boost, supplement the definition in this book's Useful Terms with one in a dictionary of literary or rhetorical terms. But go beyond others' definitions to construct one of your own, using quotations from the essays as your support.

Linnea Saukko on Writing

"After I have chosen a topic," says Linnea Saukko, "the easiest thing for me to do is to write about how I really feel about it. The goal of 'How to Poison the Earth' was to inform people, or more specifically, to open their eyes.

"As soon as I decided on my topic, I made a list of all the types of pollution and I sat down and basically wrote the paper in less than two hours. The information seemed to pour from me onto the page. Of course I did a lot of editing afterward, but I never changed the idea and the tone that I started with."

For Discussion

When have you had the experience of writing on a subject that compelled your words to pour forth with little effort? What was the subject? What did you learn from this experience?

LUCINDA ROSENFELD

LUCINDA ROSENFELD, a journalist and novelist, was born in New York City in 1969 and grew up in New Jersey. She graduated from Cornell University in 1991 and since then has written for various publications, including the *New York Times Magazine*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Elle*, *Word*, and *Talk*. From 1996 to 1998 she was the nightlife columnist for the *New York Post*. In 2000 Rosenfeld published her first novel, *What She Saw in Roger Mancuso*, *Gunter Hopstock*, *Jason Barry Gold*, *Spitty Clark*, *Jack Geezo*, *Humphrey Fung*, [. . .]—the list of the title and the book itself cover all the significant male relationships of the heroine's life between fifth grade and age twenty-five. Rosenfeld currently lives in Brooklyn, New York.

How to Dump a Friend

In this 2001 essay from the *New York Times on the Web*, Rosenfeld writes with her typical blend of perceptiveness and humor to advise readers about a difficult social problem.

The phone begins to ring—and ring and ring. "It was so great to see you," 1
says Friend A. And "I hope you're not mad, but I loved your boots so much I
went out and bought the same ones!" And "What are you doing Friday?" And
"Do you have any lunch plans on Monday?" And "What about Tuesday?" And
"I haven't seen you since Wednesday!" And "I know it's only Thursday
but . . ." And "I just don't feel like you care about my life. I mean, it's *always*
about you, Lucinda."

We're all familiar with the benefits of friendship—blame James Taylor¹— 2
but what about when pals turn parasitic, sucking the very life out of us with
their metastasizing demands for more time, attention and sympathy? In high
school, blowing off a friend was as easy as sitting at a different table in the
cafeteria. Or making a face and a snippy comment at the sight of her sloppy
Joe. ("Are you really going to eat that?")

In the more passive-aggressive arena of adult life, the weeding process is 3
typically accomplished via unreturned phone calls and the chronic cancella-
tion of social engagements forty-five minutes before they're due to take place.

This is because, at heart, adults are huge wimps. I count myself among 4
their ranks.

But is there a better way to cut bait? 5

In the case of acquaintances, the silent treatment is perfectly appropriate. 6

¹ Taylor's "You've Got a Friend" was a number-one hit in the early 1970s.—Eds.

Where time and emotion have been invested, however, an honest explanation is the least you can offer. Well, maybe not precisely. Where your friend's greatest crime is having an annoying personality, it's best to keep your objections general, as in, "There are times when I have really needed you to be there for me, Sally/Bob, and you haven't come through." After which you might want to list one or two of those times. For instance, "It really hurt my feelings when you blew off my blessing ceremony to attend a breathing workshop."

If something more serious has occurred, however, you need to spell it out, as in: "I will never forgive you for calling my mother and telling her I was addicted to horse tranquilizers. My mother and I have a difficult enough time getting along as it is."

Or, as Ruth Ehrenkranz, a psychoanalyst in New York, suggests relaying to your friend, "There has been irreparable damage here, and I just don't feel I could ever be close to you again."

I guess Ehrenkranz wouldn't have approved of the way I "broke up" with my best friend and roommate in college—namely by writing a string of expletives in the memo line of a check I owed her for back rent. In my own defense, things had already gotten pretty hairy by then, with my roommate padlocking her bedroom door with the telephone we shared behind it, and then moving to her boyfriend's for the week.

It's also important to know whom you're dumping before you dump. If you're saying so long to a vindictive psycho, put the blame on yourself. For example, instead of "Here's the thing, Sally/Bob, I look at you and start to feel sick," you might want to offer a more conciliatory "I have my own boundary issues right now, Sally/Bob, and I just don't have time for anyone else's."

Also be especially delicate when you and your dumppee have friends in common. This is the time to resort to euphemism, cliché and therapy-speak—for example, "I just feel as if we're at different points in our lives," as opposed to "Your presence casts a pall on every room you enter." Otherwise, prepare to burn bridges where traffic once flowed freely, as well as gain a reputation for unrestrained venality.

Your farewell address is likely to have the most impact if delivered in person, preferably in a neutral setting like a coffee shop, where quiet calm is the rule of the day, and food, therefore, is unlikely to fly. (Consider meeting at one of your homes only if you want to slug it out on the living-room floor and conclude the afternoon with a lachrymose journey down memory lane.)

If that's not possible, there's always the telephone. And if the thought of any verbal confrontation leaves you (the breaker-upper) dreading the dump so ferociously that you begin to fantasize about contracting a fatal disease in the interim, you have my permission to write a letter. In any case, e-mail is a

no-no, not merely because your message is likely to be forwarded to every name in your friend's address book. It's also just impersonal enough to suggest that you don't care and never did.

Finally, whether you have any interest in having your mind changed, it's only fair to allow your pal a rebuttal, if simply for the sake of seeming reasonable and kind.

Of course, the easiest way to dump a friend is not to dump him/her at all, but rather to find a way to live together. Besides, your reasons for wanting to jump ship may have more to do with your own paranoia and narcissism than with your friend's. As Martin Devine, a psychologist, says: "When you're ending a friendship, first explore why somebody doesn't fit into your life anymore. For instance, if you're working in fashion or entertainment, and your classmate from Kentucky keeps calling, and she's someone who doesn't have a lot of black clothing, then you would want to question why you're holding onto a certain lifestyle at the exclusion of someone with whom you once had a good relationship."

On the other hand, you can always turn off the ringer.

Journal Writing

How do you respond to Rosenfeld's advice? Do you think the same kind of advice would apply to breaking up with a boyfriend or girlfriend in a long-term romantic relationship? In your journal, explore why, or why not. (To take your journal writing further, see "From Journal to Essay" on the next page.)

Questions on Meaning

1. Rosenfeld's process has three distinct stages. What are they?
2. Why does Rosenfeld believe that one shouldn't break off with friends (except mere acquaintances) without an explanation? Why does she advise against breaking off a friendship through an e-mail message? What does her advice suggest about how she feels about friendships?
3. Why does Rosenfeld believe that ending a friendship can be "especially delicate when you and your dumppee have friends in common" (par. 11)?
4. Why do you think Rosenfeld concludes by suggesting that, rather than dump a friend, one might instead "find a way to live together" (par. 15)?

Questions on Writing Strategy

1. What would you say is Rosenfeld's PURPOSE in this essay? Is it primarily to entertain readers, or is she offering serious advice? What makes you think so?

ADDITIONAL WRITING TOPICS

Process Analysis

1. Write a *directive* process analysis (a “how-to” essay) in which, drawing on your own knowledge, you instruct someone in doing or making something. Divide the process into steps, and be sure to detail each step thoroughly. Some possible subjects (any of which may be modified or narrowed):

How to find games (or another kind of software) on the Internet

How to enlist people’s confidence

How to bake bread

How to meditate

How to teach a child to swim

How to select a science fiction novel

How to drive a car in snow or rain

How to prepare yourself to take an intelligence test

How to compose a photograph

How to judge cattle

How to buy a used motorcycle

How to enjoy an opera

How to organize your own rock group

How to eat an artichoke

How to groom a horse

How to bellydance

How to make a movie or videotape

How to build (or fly) a kite

How to start weight training

How to aid a person who is choking

How to behave on a first date

How to get your own way

How to kick a habit

How to lose weight

How to win at poker

How to make an effective protest or complaint

Or, if you don’t like any of those topics, what else do you know that others might care to learn from you?

2. Step by step, working in chronological order, write a careful *informative* analysis of any one of the following processes. (This is not to be a “how-to” essay, but an essay that explains how something works or happens.) Make use of **DESCRIPTION** wherever necessary, and be sure to include frequent **TRANSITIONS**. If one of these topics gives you a better idea for a paper, go with your own subject.

How a student is processed during orientation or registration

How the student newspaper gets published

How a particular Web search engine works